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XXVII. ACCOUNT

OF THE WRITING-ROCK IN TAUNTON RIVER ;

*In a letter to the Hon. John Davis, Esq. Recording Secretary of the
American Academy of Arts and Sciences.*

BY Mr. E. A. KENDAL.



Hallowell, Oct. 29, 1807.

DEAR SIR,

I LEAVE in this neighbourhood, according to promise, a copy of my transcript of the writing-rock in Taunton river. Mr. Vaughan will obligingly forward this letter, and the inscription will be delivered to you through the care of Mrs. Gardiner.

You are already aware, that I indulged, in several successive visits, during my stay at Dighton, my curiosity concerning this singular monument ; a curiosity strongly excited by your communication of facts, papers, and draughts.—I proceed to inform you of what I have seen, heard, and thought.

The writing-rock is a block of gneiss, a species of secondary granite, lying on Asonet neck, on the eastern side of Taunton river on the land of a Mr. Deane, within the township of Berkeley, county of Bristol, and state of Massachusetts. Its foot, in front, is about ten or twelve feet from low water mark, and its top is covered, at high water, to a height of two or three feet, or more. Its face measures eleven feet seven inches at the base, five feet one inch in its extreme height, and is an inclined plane, having an inclination of about sixty degrees. The two ends correspond, or nearly correspond with the face ; so as to present, on three sides of the rock, the base of a pyramid. The

top or back shelves, in irregular ledges and fractures, from its summit to the surface of the soil, giving a thickness, which increases, in the descent, from one inch to perhaps six feet. The base of the rock, at the northeast angle, is partly above, and partly incumbent on the surface of the ground ; and, with respect to the remaining and more considerable portion, is sunk to a small depth.

As to colour, the rock, to speak generally, is of a purple red. To describe it more particularly, the face, as low as rather more than a foot from its summit, has a dark tint, of the hue mentioned. Below this is a region of a much lighter tint ; and toward the base is another, somewhat green. The *internal* colour of the rock, which is a light grey, no where appears, except where laid bare by recent fracture. The several colours, the diversity of which forces itself upon the eye, are bounded horizontally ; and are occasioned by the difference of the periods of time, during which the parts of the rock are exposed to the air. The summit, which is first abandoned by the water, and last covered again, is purple ; the middle region is less acted upon by the oxygen of the atmosphere, and the lowest is most favourable to the growth of the byssus. Were the rock beyond the reach of the tide, its surface would be grey, like that of others, of the same stone.

On approaching the rock for the first time, I suffered no disappointment ; my respect for it was not lessened, but increased ; and in particular I was greatly struck with the regularity of its figure. Three of the sides, as I have already described, are uniformly inclined, whence it proceeds, that the breadth of the face, which, at the base line, is eleven feet seven inches, is diminished, at the height of four feet, to ten feet three inches. The two ends, though fashioned to this general figure, are indeed very uneven ; but the face, near the summit, is as smooth as the saw could leave it, and, beneath, as much so as

might justify the belief of ruder workmanship. After all I am of opinion, that this configuration is from the hand of nature, and that the artist, who engraved the inscription, rather chose his rock on account of the symmetry, which he observed in it, than prepared it to his taste ; a conclusion, to which I am the rather inclined, not only from a disposition to avoid a too eager aggrandisement of this ancient relic, but from some internal evidence of the sculpture. First, that in more than one instance the drawing appears to have been accommodated to the irregular outlines of the rock, such as we now behold them ; and secondly, that on the end, fronting the northeast, there are two or three figures, resembling the letter O, sculptured, not upon the remaining part of what might be esteemed the original surface, but within one of the recesses, or parts, where that surface has been broken or worn away. Indeed, if the face and ends had been the work of tools, it is scarcely to be imagined, that the same tools would not have been employed to form the summit according to an horizontal line ; and that such horizontal line ever existed the situation of the upper figures, partly made to follow the actual line of the summit, and partly deficient in precision, as to their base line, renders altogether improbable. It might however be contended, that the figures representing the letter O, and formed on the northeast end, are modern ; that is, engraved since the surface has been worn or broken ; or perhaps, with less danger of overthrow, an opinion might be maintained, that nature bestowed only the general pyramidal form, and that art has smoothed the face, and done no more. Against such a theory the lateral figures, when or by whomsoever executed, would prove nothing ; and in its favour it might be argued, with plausibility, that to smooth the surface of a rock is a work of less art, than to engrave that surface ; and that, what it was thus comparatively easy to execute, it was in the highest degree natural to desire ; for the value of a smooth

surface, as well for execution as for legibility, must be obvious to the rudest artist. If we are to attribute the inscription itself to an Indian hand, we know, from many specimens of Indian workmanship in our possession, that it would be idle to dispute either an Indian's inclination or his skill in smoothing, polishing, and even fashioning the rock. A fact also, which might be adduced on this side of the question, is, that at the southwest angle of the rock, where it is sunk below the surface of the sand, the inclined figure of the face, after descending about six inches, is terminated suddenly by an horizontal ledge, affording an appearance precisely similar to what might be expected from every workman, who, after giving form and finishing to what is exposed to view, leaves in a state entirely or partially rude, what is concealed from the eye. Precisely indeed, as every block of stone, partly exposed, and partly hidden, is treated by every mason. On the whole, I permit myself only to observe, on the one hand, that the present condition of the work, in many respects, is very much what it probably would have been, had it anciently received even a complete pyramidal form ; on the other, I freely add, that I have seen many rocks, where no suspicion of art could attach, of figures equally regular, and even equally approaching the pyramid. I end therefore, as I have already premised, by supposing the rock to have been selected, on account of that very symmetry, or approach to symmetry, which leads to this inquiry.

I have dwelt, without hesitation, upon this natural or artificial pyramidal figure (a particular hitherto, as far as I am apprized, undiscussed, and even unnoticed), because it appears to be capable of being made of some importance in the history of the rock, and therefore in the historical evidence, which the rock may at any time be thought to offer. That where there was means of executing the inscription, there should also be means of fashioning the rock, would be nothing re-

markable ; but if, as there may be reason to believe, the pyramid is a figure in masonry, originating in Egypt out of local circumstances and from that alone derived to those circumjacent, the fact of a pyramidal figure in the rock, artificially produced, might be made to give support to theories, false or true, of the transatlantic origin of the inscription, and thus affect the great point or points of history, which it may one day be found sufficient to elucidate. Independently too on the hypothesis, which respects the exclusive origin of the pyramid, the state, in which the rock was found or left by the artist, must necessarily influence our judgment in a variety of particulars.

I come now to speak of the inscription ; and first, of its execution. Before I saw the original I had seen the several copies made by Messrs. Sewall, Winthrop, and Baylies. I found that the first conveyed too mean, and the third too high an idea of the execution. The execution, an adequate instrument supposed, is nothing extraordinary ; but it is not entirely unworkmanlike. The lines, though most of the draughts, including Mr. Winthrop's, have represented them as true, are not so ; but they are firm. As to the mode of execution, that appears to be no other than the use of a pointed tool, of necessity harder and less brittle, than the very hard and brittle rock, on which it has wrought. In some parts of the inscription the marks of a pointed tool are still distinctly visible ; and where this is not the case, the *chissel* at least will be excluded from the calculation. The upper figures, on inspection, on the rock may be thought rather the work of the *gouge*, than of a pointed tool. It is certain, that the use of the latter is not so obvious in these, as in the lower figures ; but the surface of the lower region of the face is more worn, than the upper ; the figures are consequently less sunk, and I suppose, that through this cause and effect the pecking of the tool is rendered more conspicuous. Be this as it may, the lines, forming some of the lower fig-

ures, are double rows of pecks, and but slightly hollowed between; while the lines of the upper figures are broader, and more or less regularly concave. Among the lower figures however that, which is apparently a human figure, and is placed under the left shoulder of the bust, is peculiarly well defined, has the edges somewhat sharp, the lines are sunk below the surface rather in a flat, than a concave form. The depth of the lines never exceeds the third of an inch; and the breadth varies from half an inch to a whole one.

By what has been said, an account of the *style* of execution is nearly anticipated. It has appeared, that the lines are cut into the rock, or the term of art is, are *en creux*; and that they are hollowed, not in the triangular form, making two sides of a prism, such as lines are produced by the chissel; but generally in that of the segment of a cylinder. To these particulars it should be added, that the figures are represented by mere outlines, and consequently in the simplest mode of sculpture.

Having glanced at the degree of excellence, and at the mode and style of the execution or sculpture, I come to the design or plan of the drawing; to its degree of excellence, and to its style or character.

With respect to the design or plan, I have two observations to offer. The execution or sculpture I have represented as nothing remarkable; but I must subjoin, that the design is intricate or artificial in the extreme. This will probably be confessed by those, who inspect the copy; and it is still more undeniable, when the rock itself is under the eye. The figure, formed of so many triangles, which is at the top and nearly in the centre of the inscription, goes far, I think, in bearing out my assertion; *it has a character eminently peculiar, and strongly marked.* We cannot but fix our attention on the boldness as well as singularity, with which the artist, after intending through the greater part of the figure a correspondence of parts, abruptly quits in

the upper limb on the right this careful uniformity, and runs at once from right lines and angles into curvilinear figures of the freest sweep.

The curvilinear figures give birth to my second remark. I conceive them to authorise a conclusion, that the design has proceeded from an artist not unacquainted with pen or pencil ; or at least from one, whose taste has been influenced, though possibly without his knowledge, by the use of those instruments, in other hands than his. I rest this opinion on the general proposition, that curved lines in sculpture proceed from imitation of the other graphic arts, in which the material and the instrument used are of a nature to give less check to the suggestions of the fancy. When therefore a sculptor forsakes the short road of right lines, he attempts, with his reiterated strokes and lagging pace, to follow the wanton excursions of an instrument gliding over an unresisting surface, and leaving, without effort, the traces of its course. This is what, I believe, may be affirmed of all sculptured inscriptions ; and yet, in the inscription before us, not only there are curved lines, which appear on the draughts, but in contemplating the rock with the advantage of certain lights, I have thought that I discovered in every part curvilinear ligatures, conjoining all, or nearly all the figures, which compose the inscription. But the very idea of *joining-hand* in sculpture presupposes, upon the principles laid down, the prior existence of a more facile mode of writing ; and even without this idea, the mere frequency of curved lines is sufficient testimony.

Passing from the design to the drawing, I shall observe, that we must not depreciate the merit of the artist, because of the uncouthness, and still less of the unintelligibility of his picture. The figures are less ill drawn, than they are uncouth and unaccountable. The style of drawing appears to be technical or conformable to some artificial mode of

representation, and not such as aims at the natural forms of things. If this be so, then we must try the artist in other points, than in the beauty of his outline, which was not within his control, or in its fidelity, of which we can form no opinion. We must look solely to what is to be termed his *pencilling* ; to the decision and masterlike protraction of his lines ; and, in this view, though nevertheless I think but humbly of the work, I shall risk nothing in declaring, that the ordinary artists of our own age, our sign-painters, our sculptors of grave-stones and mill-stones, and others, exhibit less ability, than the drawer of the inscription on the writing-rock in Taunton river. As to the drawing of what appears to be human figures, it ought to be observed, that if what purports to be a human head, namely a circle or an oval, with two holes for the eyes, and one, which serves for a nose and mouth together ; if what purports to be a human head, be only a very rude and imperfect representation, we shall find on looking lower, that all effort to produce the human figure is utterly declined. Forms wholly unintelligible, and to the last degree remote, supply the place ; and force us to acknowledge, that the want of will is more certain, than the want of capacity. The curved lines have a freedom not to be equalled by every hand among ourselves.

On the contents of the inscription, I have little or nothing to offer. To describe would, in a majority of instances, be to explain ; and this last is beyond the limits of my pretensions. The figures must remain, for me, just what every man pleases to call them. I shall only repeat my opinion, that some of them are mere ligatures between others ; and remark, in further proof of the tincture of imitative betrayed in this sculpture, and consequently of the implied previous and known existence of other works of art, that each of the three figures, bearing human heads, may be observed to stand upon a foot or pedestal. Now this support can never have been imitated from

nature, or suggested by any thing incident to even any one of the graphic arts ; but necessarily indicates, either that the thing intended to be represented is a piece of statuary, or that the habit of contemplating statuary has introduced this servile following of one of its resources.* In surveying a monument, like this in question, the mind naturally becomes curious, as to its history and signification ; and more than one attempt has been made, as to the writing-rock, to satisfy us as to the first by clearing up all obscurity as to the second. For my own part I think, that we are still in perfect uncertainty, as to both. The few opinions, which, relatively to certain points, I venture myself to entertain, I shall here submit.

It appears to be uncontroverted, except by the ignorance of some of those, who live in the neighbourhood of the rock, that this is a monument of an antiquity antecedent to the settlement of Europeans on this continent ; and I am of opinion, that it is of an antiquity considerably higher.

I am of opinion also, that it was wrought on some solemn occasion, or for some solemn purpose, either civil, military, or religious. It may be a memorial, a monition, or an offering of piety.

I am of opinion further, that it bears, even now, sufficient traces of the people, by whom it was produced ; and consequently, that, to ascertain this, we need only to discover from whom any similar works have proceeded.

The first of these opinions is founded on a comparison of the great durability of the stone with the great inroads of time ; the second, on the orderly and yet arbitrary arrangement of the figures, the unity of the composition, and the labour necessary to the execution ;

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* There is an Indian bust in the nature of a basso relievo in the museum at Hartford in Connecticut, and a piece of Indian statuary at Yale college.

the last, on the extreme peculiarity of several of the figures ; a peculiarity so exclusive, that, were any similar to be found, of which the origin was certain, I should without difficulty claim the same origin for this inscription. The technical character of the figures contributes largely to this peculiarity. They have in them nothing of calligraphy ; nothing of an universal alphabet. They are the property of some one people, and of no other. The strange configuration of the objects having human heads, and the complicate and artificial construction of those made up of triangles, are clearly entitled to this character.

But to what quarter are we to look for this peculiar people ? Shall we attribute it to the savage follower of the fishery and the chase, or to learned circumnavigators ? To the inhabitants of the surrounding forests, or to sojourners from the ancient seats of arts and civilization ?

I am decidedly of opinion, that this monument is in no respect derivable from the opposite side of the Atlantic. I discern in it nothing of the alphabets, or the drawing, or the taste of Europe, or Asia, or Africa ; and my belief on this head has been greatly strengthened by the knowledge of a fact, communicated to me by the reverend Mr. Bentley of Salem. This gentleman, in speaking of the writing-rock, and of professor Sewall's visit and draught, lately assured me, that professor Sewall, in reply to a question put by himself, declared to him, that he had seen nothing on the rock, which reminded him of any ancient alphabet.

Three difficulties present themselves, if we suppose the inscription to be the work of the people known as the inhabitants of the north east coast of America. First, that nothing similar has been described, as existing among them ; secondly, that no disposition to produce any thing similar has been observed ; and thirdly, that it is scarcely possible to conceive the execution of this inscription, upon a

block of gneiss, without the use of iron, or at least of hardened copper.

Concerning all these points however, it will be proper for us to suspend our judgment. We may yet be convinced of what we at present cannot understand, the possibility of engraving an inscription like the present, with no better tools, than those of stone ; further inquiry may satisfy us, that there is nothing on this rock above the contrivance, or inconsistent with the taste of the present aborigines ; and facts are not wanting to lead to a suspicion, that the writing-rock is not a solitary instance of antique inscription discoverable in America. I have read, either among the papers of the late President Stiles, of which you were so good as to afford me a perusal, or in some other place, of *painted rocks*, among the Indians, known to the ufr-traders of Canada ; and I have collected from the MSS. of President Stiles, and other sources, a list of no less than ten places on this continent, where sculptured rocks are found, or are reported so to be. The first is the writing-rock in Taunton river ; the second in Tiverton ; and the third in Rutland, all in the state of Massachusetts ; the fourth is near Newport in Rhode Island ; the fifth at Scaticook on the Housatonic in the township of Kent, and state of Connecticut ; the sixth in Brattleborough on the Connecticut, in the state of Vermont ; the seventh on a large stratum of rocks on the southeast side of the Ohio, about two miles below the mouth of Indian or King's Creek, and fifty below Pittsburg ; the eighth on the Alatomaha in Georgia ; the ninth on the Alleghany, fifteen miles below Benango, one hundred and ten below Fort Pitt, and seventy miles south of Lake Erie ; the tenth on the Cumberland, near Rock-castle neck.

This list, as I flatter myself, will not be unacceptable. It is of a nature to excite inquiry, and to concentrate the results. A collection of all the sculptures would be highly interesting, and they might per-

haps elucidate each other. It would at least discover to us, whether they are or are not the works of the same people, scattered over a wide extent of country. The painted rocks of the north are also objects of interest. A people may change, according to circumstances, the materials they employ, and yet retain their style. We ought to know the style of these painted inscriptions. Do they contain rude drawings of natural objects, or of conventional signs, or of technical and emblematic figures ?

My own wish and design is to visit all the sculptured rocks. This I may never be able to accomplish ; but I presume to urge you to lose no opportunity of procuring information and drawings of their contents.

The list itself exhibits an almost unbroken series of coincidences in one particular, and inquiry may fill up every chasm. The writing-rock stands on the side of a river, and below high water mark ; and nearly all the remaining nine are described, as likewise seated on a river. This may be owing to the predilection of the savages, in common with all men, for the banks of rivers ; it may be owing to the open and conspicuous situation of the rocks so placed ; but it may also be owing to the nature and purpose of the sculptures, which may have reference to something nautical.

But further coincidences present themselves between the written rocks on Taunton river and on the Ohio. Those on the Ohio are said to be on the southeast side of the stream, and this is the situation of that on Taunton river. The latter fronts the northwest ; and so, in all probability, do those on the Ohio. Add, that the rocks on the Ohio are said to be close to the river, and sometimes entirely covered, and that the rock in Taunton river is covered every tide.

If it should be found, that the rocks are generally so seated as to be covered *sometimes* by water, this fact itself will throw some light upon their history ; and at least induce us to relinquish the attempt to show, that the water of Taunton river did not always overflow the soil, upon which the rock is found, and still less the summit of the rock itself.

There is no doubt but that, generally speaking, the rivers of America have rather retired from, than risen upon their ancient margins ; but this is no evidence against particular instances of usurpation, which must necessarily occur, even in a river, which on the whole diminishes. That part of Taunton river, in which the rock is found, is so circumstanced, as easily to be admitted among these exceptions. The river, as it passes the west side of Asonet neck, suddenly widens from twenty five rods to ninety, entering this gulf with a current from the northwest, and therefore setting on the neck. A great proportion of the bed of the river in this wider part is composed of flats, on which, at ebb-tide, there is only a foot and a half or two feet of water ; and beyond these flats, and also beyond a lesser channel at the foot of a gently ascending shore, is seated the rock. If we suppose that the current has worn away any natural mound, which formerly lay between the great channel and the rock, we immediately restore, in imagination, the river to its proportionate width, and the rock to dry land. Thus too we get rid of the difficulty of conceiving, that so much labour should have been bestowed, in producing something to be seen in a situation, which, from the natural course of the tides, could only allow it to be exposed, at short and varying periods, sometimes by day, but as often by night.

But as to the probable state of Taunton river at the period of engraving the inscription, and as to the difficulty of conceiving that a rock, covered at every tide, was chosen for this purpose, other language may be held.

It may be said, that at least the level of the soil immediately surrounding the rock, has not materially altered ; and that inquiry concerning other rocks may show, that the preference was deliberately given to such, as were actually liable to be overflowed. It is certain, that such rocks were secured from the danger of being covered by the branches, and split by the roots of trees ; and, on the whole, among a savage people, they might be the most certain of being seen, and of remaining always visible. A river was the only highway ; and a rock, placed out of the reach of the tide, would have been speedily overgrown.

That the writing-rock was never surrounded by a soil materially higher than that, which we now see, is clear from indubitable evidence. The inscription reaches to within a short distance of the present level. Mr. Winthrop in his account, communicated to the academy, makes that distance only eight inches ; and though, from recollection, I should scarcely have made it so little, and though I have been able to trace nothing with distinctness at a greater height, yet I agree, that there are marks of the tool, at a level very little above the present surface of the soil. The rock obviously stands as it originally stood ; the soil therefore cannot have been washed from beneath it ; and the rock must always have possessed its present level. But the level of the soil in the neighbourhood of the rock is the same with that of the bank of Asonet neck, above and below. That level rises nearly to the bottom of the inscription, and therefore it rises as high, or very nearly as high, as it did at the period of inscribing ; for though we may believe that the Indians were content to work below high water mark, it is not credible that they worked below the level of the sands. The inscription therefore, so far from disposing us to believe, that where we now see water, there was formerly dry ground, ought perhaps itself to demonstrate to us, that no alteration has taken place ; and this in corroboration I can add, that, though vague assertions are made on the spot,

purporting, that some years ago there were several rods of dry land between the rock and the river, yet on direct inquiry I found, that the oldest person neither remembered to have seen nor to have heard of any thing different from the present state of the banks and stream.

I submit with deference, that Mr. Winthrop is inconsistent with himself, and has too hastily relied on the information given him, when, after stating, that the inscription reaches to within eight inches of the ground, he relates, that the country people by digging, in the vain hope of finding treasure, have let in the tide upon the rock. It is, I believe, acknowledged, that forty years ago much labour was expended in digging about the rock with the view described ; but it ought to occur to us, that the fact of letting in the tide implies, not only the removal and disturbance, but the *carrying away* of an enormous quantity of earth ; that to produce any thing like the effect pretended (the digging being unquestionably around the rock), the previous level of the soil must have been, not only eight inches, but more than eight feet above the present, (since nothing less would exclude the tide) ; that the rock, the height of which is five feet, instead of being, as now, sometimes under water, must then have been always under ground ; and lastly, though not essential to the question, it implies, that a few money hunters, with their tiny shovels, have pared away for two miles the entire banks of this river, so as to admit from eight to twelve feet of water, with which, twice a day, they are at present covered. The tide is not, as the reader of Mr. Winthrop might imagine, merely let into a pool or cove surrounding the rock, but is let in upon the whole of Asonet neck. If ever the writing-rock stood upon dry land, it is nature alone, that has made the alteration.

In affording entertainment to the hypothesis, that the writing-rock may have been the work of Indians, I have been led into the enumeration of other works, appearing to possess some similitude, and scat-

tered over this country. The list having shown, that nearly all of them are described as being in or near rivers, I have admitted the possibility, that a preference was uniformly given to rocks seated within reach of the tide, and this has led me to an examination of the site of the writing-rock. From this digression I return.

The writing-rock is to be ascribed either to those inhabitants of America, whom Europeans have denominated Indians, to inhabitants more ancient than these, or to navigators more ancient than Columbus.

The easiest solution is that, which supposes a visit from the navigators of antiquity, who, after entering Narraganset Bay, found leisure to explore Taunton river, and chose an anchorage at Asonet neck. In this case the skill of the artist is no mystery, and we easily dismiss, with the breaking up of the ice, or the first fair wind, the authors of so extraordinary a monument. But exclusively of the objections already adduced, if similar rocks exist on the Housatonic, the Connecticut, the Ohio, the Alleghany, the Cumberland, and the Alatomaha, we shall be compelled to seek another theory.

We look next to a nation more ancient and more cultivated, than the Indians, inhabitants of this country. The writing-rock is not the only vestige, from time to time discovered, of such a people. But this silent stone, and other monuments equally silent, are all. If ever they existed, they have left nothing behind to give a tongue to their works, so that they might say to posterity, "these were theirs!" Our last resource is in the Indians.

Confining myself to criticisms on the artist, I leave it, as I find it, undetermined to what nation he belonged. Of that nation however, if what I have to remark shall have any weight, I am about to raise the character in suggesting, that this artist was not the most accomplished workman of his tribe. I could even believe, that he was

without the usual and convenient tools and instruments. I think that he was not unacquainted with works of art, of a better and higher character. I have mentioned what I suppose to be imitations, in this inscription, of pen writing, drawing, and statuary ; and I cannot but go on to believe, that the artist had seen designs executed with more accuracy, than this, which he has left us. He has evidently intended to describe equilateral angles, planes parallel to the horizon, and right and perpendicular lines ; but he has failed in almost every instance. In the drawings, which I have seen, and which I had full opportunity of comparing with the inscription itself, errors of this sort were corrected. The angles were adjusted ; and the horizontal and perpendicular lines made what they had been intended to be ; but it appeared to me, that this was no other than an important misrepresentation of the original. One of the facts, most interesting to be known, concerning this inscription, is the degree of advancement in the arts, of which it may afford testimony ; and in removing the possibility of doubt, as to the conspicuous inaccuracy of what was designed to be accurate, I have satisfied myself, that the artist worked wholly by his eye ; that his eye was not the best ; and that he had been accustomed to see, and wished to imitate figures, determined with the precision of the rule and compasses.

Among other inquiries, having reference to the rock, and naturally made in its neighbourhood, and in which I had the advantage of the polite and friendly assistance of Major Baylies of Dighton, were such as tended to discover some explanatory tradition. In this however I was unsuccessful ; nothing, which I could gather, affording a satisfactory or even specious clue. Respecting Asonet neck, on which the rock is seated, the tradition is, that it was a place of banishment among the Indians ; but whether the practice of banishment was known to the subjects of king Philip, I leave to those, who are

more conversant in Indian polity. Respecting a spring, called White spring, rising near the foot of a hill to the northeast of the rock, at the distance of a quarter of a mile both from the rock and the river, and a diminutive brook, called White man's brook, running from the neighbourhood of the spring in a southwest direction, and entering the river a little above the rock, a long, connected story is in a few mouths, but seems to have reached but few ears. It is pretended, that, according to an Indian tradition, there arrived in ancient times some *white* men in a *bird*; that the white men took some Indians into the bird, as hostages; that they filled water at the spring; that the Indians fell upon and slaughtered the white men at the spring, which thence derives its name; and that the hostages escaped from the bird. The era of this event is however rendered modern by the additional particular, that during the affray *thunder and lightning* issued from the bird; and upon inquiry of one of the family of Mr. Asa Shove, to whom the spring belongs, I could hear no repetition of this history of its name. My new informant had never heard the story; but understood, that the spring received its present appellation from the death of a white hunter, who, having been heated, drank freely of its water, and expired. The tradition of the *bird* meanwhile may have some foundation in the adventures of an early exploring voyage; with another relation, that a ship's anchor, nearly eaten away by rust, was many years since discovered near this place; and with the still more obscure account of a ship's ribs, which lay and rotted there. In this place I should mention, that some Mohawk Indians, having been shown, as it is said, a draught of the inscription, declared its meaning to be, that a dangerous animal, represented by the animal on the rock, had been killed at the place immortalized; that the human figures represent the persons, whom the animal killed; and that the others denote other parts of the affair. An objection to this interpretation

will be perceived, if the ordinary rules of criticism may take their place, in the trivial appearance and humble situation of the animal, which it is attempted to make the hero of the piece ; a station, which it might be conjectured belongs to the bust on the left. Of the animal I shall take this occasion to remark, with a view both to investigation and to the merit of the artist, that its character is strongly, and it may be presumed faithfully marked. Its body is crossed, in nearly equal divisions, with bars or stripes. It is spotted. Its head is long and delicate. It wears horns. Its feet are paws.—Already we see reason to suspect, that this is a creature of fancy, made up of the members of different animals ; and this must assuredly be the case, if the line above its back, and which is wanting in all the previous draughts, forms, as it strikes the eye, the wing of an insect.

A second subject of inquiry is the possibility of other written sculptured rocks, in the neighbourhood of that, which is known. Something of the sort is to be seen, as has been intimated, within the adjoining township of Tiverton ; but near the writing-rock there is none. I found several persons, who had heard, that a little to the south and further out in the stream a rock, being rarely visible, contained a fuller inscription than the writing-rock. All persons agreed in naming, as the author of this account, a Mr. Perry, who lives in Dighton, at an advanced age, and who has, for fifty years, visited all the rocks in the stream in search of oysters, the shells of which he sells to the kilns at Taunton. Upon inquiry of Mr. Perry, not only he had never seen such a rock, but, on the score of his experience, he ventured to affirm, that no such rock was to be found. It turned out, that no sculptured rock has been discovered ; if we except a slab, which lies to the southeast of the former, within the distance of twenty feet. On an upper corner of this is a figure, resembling a cross, or the letter X, and one or two others.

Availing myself of the kindness and the pencils of Mrs. Gardiner, I have made my sketch in oil. It represents the face of the rock, set upright and bearing the inscription. The lower corner, on the left, being fractured, I have made use of the space, to introduce a reduced figure of the whole rock. By this, as I flatter myself, you will be still further assisted, in placing before your eyes the real bulk, form, condition, and general appearance of this highly interesting monument. On the right hand of the rock, and half way up its side, I have also shown, in its actual situation, the prostrate slab, just above described.

On casting an eye over my transcript two remarks immediately present themselves to those, who are acquainted with the former draughts, and particularly Mr. Winthrop's.—The figures are fewer, and they are dissimilar. That the figures are fewer is partly true, and partly only in appearance. It is in part only in appearance, because upon a ground, representing the face of the rock, they are less obtrusive on the eye, than when they are drawn in black upon white paper; and those, who draw, are aware, that an outline always looks fuller, than a finished picture. The peculiar paucity of the figures is however in a great degree real; arising partly from my inability to discover all, that some gentlemen have seen; and partly from my willingness to leave in indistinctness, obscurity, and invisibility, what is indistinct, obscure, and almost wholly invisible, on the rock. The figures, which are distinct in my transcript, are distinct in the original. To these I have given definite forms; while in the other instances my chief care has been to depict the obscurity of the original. If you find yourself obliged to approach close to some of my figures, and can at last arrive at no certainty as to their outlines, I must beg you to remember, that this will always be your situation, when examining the rock itself. If, on the other hand, I have sometimes made definite

that, which in the original is undefined ; if I have rendered incapable of being seen in more than one form that, which on the rock may be seen in twenty, my excuse must be found in the extreme difficulty of the attempt to make a representation of any object, without giving it a shape.

The figures you will find variously coloured. In this also I have followed my original. The figures, though sunk, are almost every where of a light but corresponding tint, of the colour of that part of the face, upon which they are found ; and, as the surface of the face is variously coloured, so are the figures. The figures near the summit, where the rock is purple-red, are of a ferruginous yellow. This lighter tint of the figures produces a consequence, to which I have submitted. The figures are formed of lines *en creux*, and should therefore be shaded on that side, which is next the light ; but being rendered by their colour lighter, instead of darker than the surface, below which they are, they are apt, when shaded, to appear embossed, not hollowed. I observed this delusion on the rock itself, where the touch removes it ; but on the canvass I have omitted the shadows.

My sketch contains many inaccuracies ; some in the colouring ; some in the outlines and fissures of the rock ; and some in the figures themselves ; but notwithstanding, I believe it free from important errors, such as might frustrate my design of conveying a faithful idea of the contents, style, execution, and condition of the inscription.

If Mr. Winthrop's were the only other copy, I might feel some hesitation at the variations of mine ; but the truth is, that all the copies differ, in extraordinary particulars, from each other and from the original. Dr. Cotton Mather, who published, as I am informed, a wood-cut of what he called *two lines* of the inscription, and which two lines are to be found in the fifth volume of Jones' Abridgement of the Philosophical Transactions ; Dr. Cotton Mather substitutes for fig-

ures, at this day as plain as if they had been yesterday inscribed, others, of which it is impossible to recognize a single feature. In comparing, as Judge Baylies was so obliging as to enable me to do, the copies already mentioned with the original, Professor Sewall's appeared to be, on the whole, the most faithful, though not the best executed.

It must be inconceivable to those, who have never seen the rock, that these differences can appear in the draughts, without impeaching the veracity of the gentlemen, by whom they have been severally made. Nothing however is more possible. Some of the errors indeed are such, as can have proceeded only from haste and inattention; but a great majority are consistent with the most elaborate but ill directed endeavours. Of all others the method of procuring a copy, described by Mr. Winthrop, is the one most infallibly adapted for producing a deceitful issue. When we are told, that printers' ink was put into the lines on the rock, paper wetted and rubbed upon them, and an impression procured, we may believe, *of course*, that impression is an indisputable copy; but the delusion fades the moment that we see the rock. No such expedient can succeed. The greater part of the inscription is so much worn out, that the forms, of which it is composed, are wholly subject to the fancy; and in several places, where the figures are plain, they are made out, rather by difference of colour, than by difference of surface. Figures of the latter class can yield no impression; and those of the former will take any shape, into which the printers' ink may be spread.

Another method has been tried, with almost equal ill success. It is that of chalking the supposed lines of the inscription, and then copying from the chalk. It is true, that in this method the figures to be drawn are rendered sufficiently distinct; but it does not follow, that these figures are the same with those, engraved upon the rock. The

chalker is in the situation of a restorer of ancient readings ; he undertakes to connect and to supply ; but the real antiquarian will prefer the original, with all its obscurities and chasms. An attempt at restoration is one thing, and may be valuable ; but a true copy is another. I attempted the use of chalk myself ; but I found that I completely confused the sculpture, and that the first thing necessary was to wash all the chalk away. The inscription is to be copied only with the pencil.

While I make every allowance for the adoption of fallacious methods, for haste, and for inadvertence, there is one course of defence for what is erroneous in the draughts, against the tolerance of which I presume seriously to protest. It is that of attributing the diversities between the copies and the original to the injuries of time upon the latter ; and particularly of supposing, that when figures are found in the copies, of which no trace can be discovered on the rock, that they must have once existed there, and that they have been since obliterated.

I am satisfied, by a variety of evidence, of the over liberality of this argument, which goes to falsify antiquity, for the mere end of sustaining the credit of gentlemen's eyes. I appeal with confidence to the testimony afforded, by a comparison of the several copies with each other ; and which copies it is of importance to preserve for the very purpose of meeting the imposture. By examining the inscription on the rock, by comparing with it the older copies, by sifting the assertions of those, who represent it as having within their memory decayed, we shall be convinced, that no material alteration, within the preceding century, has really taken place. The decay no doubt is continual ; but it is very slow.

But if, losing sight of the rock, we content ourselves with comparing the draughts with each other, we shall soon be ashamed of assuming facts upon so unworthy a basis. Admitting the authenticity of the

draughts, we must prepare ourselves for some curious consequences. We should be able to show, upon their testimony, that in a variety of instances the inscription, so far from having decayed, has advanced with the progress of years, both in the number and distinctness of its figures. We should be able to show, that figures, which at the beginning of the last century appeared as they now appear, decayed in the course of fifty years into others totally dissimilar, and have since grown again into their original features.

Dr. Mather, who took or received his copy in 1712, divides the inscription into lines ; but that it is wholly insusceptible of such a division, the rock itself and all the other draughts declare. In the Doctor's second line we are not able to discover a single figure resembling those on the rock, or the smallest trace of the style of the inscription. Now it were easy to say, that his second line, on whatever part of the rock he saw it, has since decayed ; but the truth is, that in his first line he has enabled us, by some faint resemblances in the first half of it, to discover where he is ; and that in the second half he has introduced what is wholly dissimilar, though that part of the rock is at this day filled with figures the most distinct. If therefore the Doctor has not given us a faithful copy of that, which is known still to remain, why should we believe that there were in his time those other figures, which he draws, but which we can no where else discover ? We might be led to fancy, that the inscription, when Dr. Mather saw it, was more obscure, than it is at present ; but in reality it was only not more distinct ; and Dr. Mather, like his successors, toiled in the maze of conjecture.

This maze of conjecture brings me to the last point, which I shall offer to your consideration ; that of adopting the only effectual method, by which this remain of American antiquity can be fairly brought within the ken of the curious, and its preservation suitably assured.

The diversities of the copies, of which I have taken notice only with the view of fixing your first thoughts on the original, are not always, as I have argued, to be attributed to the fault of the copyists, but often to the obscurity of the sculpture, in which every man will see something different from every other. Under these circumstances no perfect copy can ever be made. The copy, which I have the honour to send you, pretends only to convey a general idea.* What I earnestly recommend is the removal of the rock, or at least of its sculptured face, from its present site, into the care of some public establishment in Boston. In Boston it will be accessible to every inquisitive spectator ; every eye will make discoveries for itself, and combinations of its own.

I shall take the liberty of adding what occurs to me, as to the practicability of the removal. The extreme height, as I have already described it, is five feet one inch above the level of the soil ; beneath, in some parts there may be an additional two feet, or more. The extreme breadth is eleven feet seven inches ; the probable extreme thickness is six feet ; and the weight, as I conjecture, is from five to six tons. Inquiry will ascertain, whether the face can be separated from the body of the rock by the saw, or by splitting, or whether the whole block must be taken together. It may also be a question, whether, if the separation be practicable, the entire removal were not more eligible. As to the method of transport, if any difficulty present itself, as to water carriage, it may be brought with facility during the winter on a sleigh. The expense may be readily known. The owner, as has been observed, is a Mr. Deane of Berkeley.

Of the value of this monument, and the degree, in which it is there-

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* Fig. 13 is an engraving from Mr. Kendal's painting, or representation of the rock in oil colours.

fore worthy of preservation, and important to be procured, you are entirely sensible. Whatever be its origin or signification, it belongs to the history of America, and perhaps to that of the world. It may prove, as some have supposed it does, that Columbus was not the first navigator in this hemisphere ; it may prove, that the red inhabitants of this country were only the successors of a more cultivated people ; or it may prove, that those red inhabitants were more cultivated, than we have supposed them. It may help us to discover the origin of the population of America.

But it will appear to some, from the obscurity, in which I have described a great part of the inscription, as being involved, that its value, as a memorial of past times, is gone. The truth however is far otherwise.

I confess myself but little sanguine, as to the prospect of interpreting, in any minute manner, this inscription ; but, though such minute interpretation should not be accomplished, we may yet ascertain its general scope ; and, what is more, we may ascertain the name and country of the people, from whom it came down to us. Several figures, sufficient for exhibiting the character of the inscription, are still plain. The character is so peculiar, that its parentage need only present itself to be acknowledged.

Lastly, I shall anticipate an objection to the removal, founded on any doubt of its utility. Its removal will be useful, because it will thus be placed within the reach of frequent observation ; and error will be dissipated. It will be useful also, because, upon all calculations of probability, it will best secure its preservation. The rock and its inscription are but little valued in their own neighborhood. The attempts to find the money, of which it has been supposed to be designed to publish the concealment, have come to nothing, and the rock is out of repute. It is robbed even of the veneration entertained by

all men for antiquity ; for it is regarded as the work of a buccaneer, to mark the deposit of his ill-gained treasure. One experiment seems yet left to the searchers for gold ; and it is a little singular, that it has not before this time been tried. The rock may be split, or blasted, to remove it, and dig beneath.

But what ignorant adventure has left undone, the regular march of industry may do. Next year, a wharf or a ship yard may be projected on the site of the writing-rock ; and its consecrated stone, grown into value or into a nuisance, may be buried, as an abutment, or broken up, to build a wall, or clear the ground.

With sincere esteem,

I am, dear sir,

your faithful, humble servant,

E. A. KENDAL.

Fig. 13.









Fig. 13.







